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ABSTRACT

The Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) provides an example of the kind of growth and differentiation that should characterize schools of education. Since 1920, HGSE has undergone a series of metamorphoses and has undertaken new and crucial commitments. The school has emerged from the turbulent 1970s with a more diverse student body, a versatile and well informed faculty, and a wider spectrum of recruitment and placement coverage. In 1979, in response to the perception that attitudes toward and products of public schools were on the decline, HGSE faculty voted to make school-site leadership a core commitment. A committee on school leadership defined guidelines for the program and worked with faculty and consultants to redesign courses for a one-year training program for potential school-site leaders. Workshops, research, and cooperative links with local schools have been implemented. The new program is not a narrowing of objectives, but a reaffirmation of HGSE's mission to advance the science and art of human learning. (FG)

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Presentation at the A.E.R.A. Panel: "A Future for Schools of Education?"

Los Angeles, April 17, 1981

by Paul N. Ylvisaker, Dean, Harvard Graduate School of Education

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1. The Role of a School of Education Now - or Whenever

I approach this topic, as I have my Deanship, with a number of perceptions and beliefs:

1) The generic concern of a school of education is with human learning: how it takes place; how it is best facilitated; what its appropriate content should be; what resources it requires; and how those resources are best allocated and aligned. Within that larger frame, a school of education can choose to concentrate on one or more spheres (e.g., elementary and secondary schooling); processes (e.g., teaching); issues (e.g., equity); clientele (e.g., adult learners); or delivery systems (e.g., television). But whatever its chosen specialty, a school of education should not burrow itself so deeply as to lose sight of that overarching concern with learning.

2) There are various considerations and criteria which may legitimately influence a school of education's choice of concentration: a legislative mandate (e.g., to train teachers); a moral commitment (e.g., to the disadvantaged); faculty competence (e.g., a strong research tradition); demographic trends (e.g., declining school-age enrollments); the emergence of new technology (e.g., interactive computers); compatability with the overall mission of the

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parent institution (e.g., the service orientation of a land-grant university). What is critical is that the choice be a considered one, and that it be backed by the necessary competence to do the job well and honestly.

3) It is not necessarily a mark of uncertainty that a school of education shifts its focus and varies its mix of specializations over time. Quite the contrary. If the fundamental concern with learning remains explicit, and if attention to generic educational roles and processes (such as teaching and human development) remains constant, those shifts are healthy signs of adaptation to the rapidly changing demography, technology, job markets and life styles of modern society.

4) There need be neither defensiveness nor a sense of second-class citizenship in maintaining a professional school of education which has learning as its central concern. Learning is, after all, one of the most basic and precious of human occupations. It is also, both as a need and a response, something that grows geometrically with an elaborating and complicating society. In the lexicon of an economist, learning in contemporary society is a growth industry - growing so rapidly, in fact, that the demand for learning has not been and cannot be contained within the conventional ages, curricula and delivery systems that have pre-occupied and stereotyped most schools of education.

5) If schools of education are to remain viable and keep their sense of basic mission intact, they will have to explode their stereotype and follow learning where it goes. Not by becoming all things to all learners. Nor by incorporating every new development into the curriculum. But at minimum by tracking the

society's needs and patterns of demand for learning, providing leadership through research and commentary on those needs and demands, and producing educators who - whatever their specialty - have wide enough perspectives and sufficiently versatile skills to wrest from an environment of constant change a creative lifetime dedicated to the advancement of human learning.

2. In that context, the Harvard Graduate School of Education

At the risk (indeed the certainty) of over-simplification, it might be helpful to sketch the history of HGSE in rapid strokes. For HGSE does have an evolving life and character of its own. It is offered not as a model, but as an example of the kind of differentiation which I believe should characterize professional schools, most of all (given the diversity of learning needs and styles) schools of education. If there is anything about HGSE worthy of emulation, it would lie in the degree to which the School has changed its curriculum over time without abandoning, obscuring, or compromising its commitment to human learning.

HGSE had its origins in a one-man department created rather summarily by President Eliot in the 1890's. Eliot was troubled by the sorry state of American secondary education. In the general interest, but more immediately to upgrade the quality of private school graduates coming to Harvard, Eliot pressed for reform. For thirty years, his chosen legate, Henry W. Holmes, did his lonely best to fulfill that mission. Then in 1920, Abraham Flexner - fresh from his triumph in remaking schools of medicine - offered Harvard a handsome endowment if it would establish a model professional school of education. Foundation money overcame the reluctance of Harvard's President Lowell, and HGSE came

into being. It began with a flare by becoming Harvard's first school to admit women to a degree program; then its light flickered for two decades until President Conant gave the School and its new Dean, Francis Keppel, a fresh mandate: to help upgrade the nation's public schools, from which Conant wanted a more nationally-representative Harvard to draw a greater proportion of its student body. Conant's charge soon found surges of supportive power in America's baby boom, growing affluence, and public and philanthropic commitment to elementary and secondary education. In the eyes of schoolmen, the next decades were halcyon years for Harvard: brilliant young M.A.T.'s and a chosen corps of budding school administrators, trained in close conjunction with schools and assured of seemingly unlimited career prospects. Research also flourished, especially as successes in science and space persuaded donors and scholars alike that knowledge and progress were synonymous.

Things never remain the same, no matter how much one might wish them to. Over the span of the single decade of the Sixties, American attitudes toward public schooling raced from positive to negative, the nation's sense of affluence dwindled along with the ranks of school-beginners, television rivalled and then overtook teachers in their absorption of pupil time and attention, and classrooms took on the ominous tones of street violence. Scholars became attracted to public policy, social context and advanced methodology - all of which permitted analysis and advocacy at a considered distance from where children were being assembled to learn.

Starting in the late 1960's, HGSE underwent another period of metamorphosis that was at once painful and generative. A faculty oriented to schooling was augmented by faculty versed in analysis of the complex social and political environment into which education had been abruptly catapulted. Then with the equally-abrupt cessation of public and philanthropic support, budgetary cuts had to be made. By 1973, the "schooling" faculty who remained at HGSE were too few to sustain even an M.A.T. program, let alone dominate the image and curriculum of the institution. Nevertheless, what happened in schools still mattered to HGSE faculty. It could, in fact, be argued that the controverted studies by Jencks et al. (in the negative), the adversarial attacks on segregation by HGSE's Center for Law and Education, and the ingenuity of Lesser and company in creating television programs as lively as Sesame Street (many more such examples could be cited) probably had more of an impact on elementary and secondary education than HGSE's influence theretofore.

During that time of metamorphosis, the School - despite cruel cuts in outside funding - took on some new and crucial commitments. Previously male and suburban in its orientation, HGSE opened its doors to minorities (averaging 20% of the student body over the last 15 years), and finally delivered on its promise to women, not least by including them in equal numbers to the "inner sanctum" of high-level administrative training and placement. In another substantial move, HGSE broke from its history-long confinement to elementary and secondary education, and entered the sphere

of post-secondary education, including continuing professional training.

HGSE emerged from the 1970's a different creature from the one that entered the chrysalis of that decade. Its spread was greater; its faculty more differentiated and at home with research; its students more diverse and mature; its training more versatile and analytic; its recruitment and placement covering a far wider spectrum of backgrounds and jobs, from pre-schooling to adult training within industry; from classroom to commercial television, from Atlanta's urban core to Zimbabwe's Ministry of Manpower and Planning.

Many who had watched this metamorphosis were confused and often despairing; similar feelings were chronically in evidence within. In retrospect, the process was a natural and almost inevitable adaptation; while it was happening - as I hope it still is - its logic was often elusive and difficult to communicate. To those used to simpler times and simpler missions, subconsciously or otherwise wanting schools of education to remain what they were (when they could be understood even if not respected), acceptance of the complex and the more fluid came hard. But for those of us who directly experienced that most recent chapter in HGSE's evolution, the outcome - a more versatile and challenging instrument for understanding and promoting human learning - seems well worth the struggles we went through.

3. In that context, HGSE's School Leadership Program

During the 1970's, HGSE had encouraged diversity in its programs, faculty and student body. But the integrating criterion persisted and was regularly used to test the validity of all that we did, or kept, or introduced. Did it relate and contribute centrally to the advancement of human learning? More than that, did it pair our competencies with issues and activities of the highest priority?

I can't say honestly that we succeeded at every turn. There is often a lag, and sometimes a discrepancy, between what a faculty will vote for, students will pay tuition for, and funders will finance, and what is arguably or demonstrably needed. Deans live precariously in that hiatus. And as against the collective stubbornnesses they see themselves contending with, their own tendentiousness shows up in their determination of "what's needed." "What's needed" very often resembles what is marketable in a very surly and stingy economy. Harvard's policy of "Each Tub on its Own Bottom" - which leaves the School of Education to forage its survival on a shriveling landscape - hardly discourages a Dean from that kind of prospecting.

I say that to distinguish the motives which led HGSE to begin the 1980's with an affirmation of its commitment to schooling, and to public schooling in particular. In so many ways, that commitment would seem to run counter to the course of the School's recent evolution: a narrowing of focus, a shift from learning writ broad, an orientation to a sector of education with enrollments, public appreciation, learning output and fiscal as well as career prospects all on the decline. Why now HGSE's resolve to come to the aid of American schooling?

It may sound sanctimonious to say that it was preponderantly a moral commitment; I happen to believe that it was. No school of education worth its salt can stand idly by when a social process as basic to our democratic values as public schooling is placed at risk (granted, among other reasons) (1) because the parents who have children in school, and therefore a direct stake in their well-being, represent only a small fraction of the voting population and cannot muster political support; (2) because a rising fraction of those needing public schooling in the 1980's will be children of immigrants and minorities, both groups vulnerable to contrary preferences of the voting majority. This nation can't afford to wipe out a social process of that import without more thought and better alternatives than is represented, say, by vouchers or tax credits. Nor can this nation afford to waste another generation of disadvantaged kids, for whom public schools are one of the very few routes still open to them for escaping the streets and entering at least some tributary of the mainstream.

Strange perhaps to say, research - so often blamed for distancing academics from reality and commitment - contributed heavily to our faculty's resolve. Ten years ago, scholars had been discouraged by the findings of Coleman and Jencks. Then a few lonely voices - one among them being Ron Edmonds of our own faculty - began asking a question that turned negative into positive: "What can we learn from schools that do work?" Alongside came 15,000 Hours and John Goodlad and growing numbers of the scholarly cohort - each with encouraging results based on systematic

inquiry. Research had made it respectable to hope - and made more such research even more respectable. Moreover, for the first time in a good long while, practitioners in the field - not least our alumni - found the writings of scholars supportive of the arduous tasks they were engaged in. Similarly pleased were the President and Fellows of Harvard, who had never become easy with the concept of a school of education not conspicuously grounded in a fundamental and operative concern with schools; learning was understandable as an abstraction but seemed to lead in too many directions to serve without further definition as a statement of mission.

In that atmosphere of congenial currents, the decision to focus on School Leadership was both welcome and predictable. That decision did not, it is essential to add, did not signal a concentration on school-site leadership to the exclusion of other legitimate concerns or the abandonment of skills and emphases so laboriously developed over the years before. HGSE remains a place where training and research continue in children's television, moral and other facets of human development, educational policy and administration at all levels, teaching and curriculum in all kinds of learning environments. Training and research of that sometimes bewildering but always stimulating variety constitute almost equal shares of our $10 million budget; and we're determined to stay with approximately that range and balance. We continue to believe that learning is a mission that extends beyond schooling. though we want to affirm that schooling, especially public schooling, deserves a place at the core.

The decision to make school-site leadership a core commitment was affirmed in December, 1979, by a unanimous vote of the faculty. It came after six months of careful deliberation, starting with the appointment of a special committee of eight senior faculty drawn from all of the School's three major Areas, also included were the chairpersons of those Areas. Their presence, and the fact that as Dean I chaired the Committee, symbolized the school-wide scope of the proposed commitment; the powerful membership of the Committee underscored its importance. We then asked a distinguished elementary school principal, Roland Barth of Newton, Massachusetts, to join us as study director. His explicit assignment was to make the opening statement to the Committee, distilling from his many interviews with practitioners what they believed were the priority problems to which HGSE should and hopefully could address. From the three-month dialogue that ensued came the "Barth Report." That Report recited the relevant history of the School, argued the case for concentrating on school-site leadership and sketched out some programs of training, research and service, illustrative of what HGSE might develop. The December vote of the full faculty constituted an approval in principle of that Report.

Immediately following the vote, a continuing Committee on School Leadership was appointed to translate generalities into specifics and to make certain we didn't lose momentum. Patricia Albjerg Graham agreed to chair the Committee; its other members are the Chairpersons of the three Areas: Courtney Cazden (Teaching, Curriculum and Learning Environments); Stephen Bailey (Administration, Planning and Social Policy); and

Gerald Lesser (Human Development, Reading and Counseling). Financial support for developmental activity has come from three sources: the Henry Luce Foundation; the Lyndhurst Foundation; and in an extraordinary action, the President and Fellows of Harvard who voted the "front money" we needed to add two essential appointments to our faculty.

Over the past year and a half, the Committee has:

(1) set a number of ground rules and guidelines: e.g., that whatever activities we undertake should lie at the core of the School's curriculum and faculty interests as opposed to simple add-ons which, however useful in themselves, would be peripheral. Thus our work with school principals, obviously central figures in making schools effective, will involve training within the regular curriculum as well as in special institutes. It will also be accompanied by continuing research in which our core faculty will participate. The Committee has specified four main themes as guides in framing relevant programs in training and research; all are aimed at the objective of building effective schools. They are: (a) enhancing children's learning and development; (b) working with colleagues and community; (c) managing the system and overcoming constraints; (d) developing a theory of schooling and its role in society.

(2) stimulated an exchange among HGSE faculty already engaged in pertinent research, and encouraged wider faculty participation through a series of special seminars conducted during the Spring of 1980.

(3) retained the services of a seasoned practitioner, Larry Cuban,

to devise alternative models of year-round and short-term institutes for the training of principals and other school leaders. Those models were then tested in a consultative conference of scholars and practitioners drawn from around the country.

(4) worked with faculty to fashion and redesign courses relevant to a one-year program of training for active and potential school-site leaders. That program is to be inaugurated, at least in prototype, in the coming academic year. A modest fund has been set up to help stimulate course planning and development.

(5) commissioned the writing of case studies for use both in year-long and short-term training programs;

(6) authorized a series of practitioner workshops. Roland Barth has already held five separate conferences with principals, housemasters and assistant principals, superintendents, staff development specialists, and representatives of professional school associations. They are helping design a major innovation, soon operative: a Principals' Resource Center, which will provide information, in-service training and consultation on a participatory basis. The other workshops will focus on building confidence in schools (led by Associate Professor Terry Deal), an analysis of the American experience with alternative schools (conducted by Visiting Professor Vito Perrone), and legal mandates affecting equal opportunity and educational equity (organized by Assistant Professor Rosemary Salomone).

(7) approved a major research proposal advanced by HGSE's Institute for Educational Policy Studies (principally Professors David Cohen and Jerome Murphy) which focuses on the impact of governmental policies and requirements on actual practice in selected schools.

(8) joined in planning a second phase of Harvard's involvement in court-ordered pairings with Boston schools. For the past five years, the University has worked in partnership with Roxbury High School. With the likely closing of that school, we are looking toward more system-wide linkages through an evolving institute for the training of principals and other school personnel.

(9) participated in the search for two new faculty who are to assume the central roles in HGSE's School Leadership Program. That search has been completed; both appointments have been voted by the faculty and will be announced as soon as the University's governing board has given final approval. The new members will be formally attached to the Teaching, Curriculum and Learning Environments Area of the School. That Area, under the general guidance of the Committee on School Leadership and the immediate direction of Professor Courtney Cazden, has been assigned academic responsibility for the Program.

A final note: Harold "Doc" Howe will join the HGSE faculty upon his retirement as vice-president of the Ford Foundation. We expect him to be a key figure in the Program's further development.

4. Again, in Perspective

HGSE's decision to join the quest for effective schooling and the vibrant leadership necessary to achieve it, is part of a continuous process of translating the School's basic mission into programs that are responsive to changing need and circumstance. It was prompted by the threatened demise of the American public school, by our long-standing commitment to the democratic values which public schooling represents, and by the spirit of hope that has found support in recent research and enlightened practice. Schools can be made to work even in the most bleak of urban environments, and for children of minimal advantage and prospects.

The decision should not be read as a narrowing of objective or as a step backward in time. We are not retreating to some real or imagined golden age. Our mission remains the fundamental one of advancing the science and the art of human learning. But we do not see ourselves fulfilling that mission without involving our faculty and our students in the day-to-day and longer-run concerns of the institutions in which young Americans still find most of their learning opportunities.

Our School Leadership Program will be a modest one, whether judged by the magnitude of the problem, or by the percentage of students who will concentrate in this special field (at most, I would think, 10% of our total enrollment of 1100). But scale is not the measure of what we expect the Program to accomplish. The entire faculty of the School has made a commitment. And that commitment, I'm certain, will have a profound effect on everything we do.